

HOUSE RESOLUTION 119

By Lamar

A RESOLUTION to commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

WHEREAS, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., dedicated his life to securing this nation's fundamental principles of liberty and justice for all citizens; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King was the leading civil rights advocate of his time, spearheading the Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, and earned worldwide recognition as an eloquent and articulate spokesperson for equality; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was born on January 15, 1929, and attended a segregated public school in Georgia; and

WHEREAS, he enrolled at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, at the age of fifteen and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from that institution in 1948, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King received his Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1951 from Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania and his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Theology from Boston University in 1955; and

WHEREAS, during his time in Boston, Dr. King met Coretta Scott, who would become his life partner and fellow civil rights activist; the couple were married on June 18, 1953, and had two sons and two daughters; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King was ordained in the Christian ministry in February 1948 at the age of nineteen at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and subsequently became assistant pastor of that esteemed congregation; and

WHEREAS, in 1954, he accepted the call of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and served as pastor there until November 1959, when he resigned to return to Atlanta to lead the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); and

WHEREAS, from 1960 until his death in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was again a pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church, alongside his father; and

WHEREAS, between 1957 and 1968, Dr. King traveled more than 6 million miles, delivered more than 2,500 speeches, and wrote five books and numerous articles, supporting efforts around the nation to end injustice and bring about social change and desegregation; and

WHEREAS, in order to observe, reflect, and celebrate the fullness of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy, we must take up and reckon with Dr. King's rejection of the economic status quo and his shift toward economic justice in the later years of his life; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King believed that without economic justice it would be impossible to achieve the full citizenship that was promised to all marginalized people by the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King, Marion Wright, and the SCLC launched the Poor People's Campaign as the beginning of a new co-operation, an understanding, and a determination by poor people of all colors and backgrounds to assert and win their right to a decent life and respect for their culture and dignity; and

WHEREAS, at the Campaign's conception, Dr. King sought to organize 2,000 poor people to go to Washington, D.C., southern states, and northern cities to meet with government officials to demand jobs, unemployment insurance, a fair minimum wage, and education for poor adults and children; and

WHEREAS, on May 12, 1968, roughly one month after the assassination of Dr. King, his widow, Coretta Scott King, led thousands of women to activate the Poor People's Campaign. On May 13, 1968, Resurrection City was erected on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., and

over the course of the next month, demonstrators outlasted the staggering heat to demand economic opportunity at different federal agencies; and

WHEREAS, as a result of the 1968 leg of the Poor People's Campaign, 200 counties received free surplus food distribution, and some federal agencies agreed to hire poor people to lead poverty programs; and

WHEREAS, the Poor People's Campaign continues today, advocating for its Declaration of Rights and the Poor People's Moral Agenda, which tackles systemic racism, poverty and inequality, ecological devastation, national morality, and war economy and militarism; and

WHEREAS, according to the Institute for Economic and Racial Equity at the The Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, "policy drives the racial wealth gap." This means that "policy changes rather than behavioral changes" are the key in closing the wealth gap across racial groups. As legislators who craft state policy, legislators must ensure that the policies they create do not exacerbate but rather work to shrink the existing disparities; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic amplified and worsened the existing wealth inequalities across racial groups; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King's economic justice work remains unfinished today. State legislatures must commit to and reaffirm their commitment to manifesting and actualizing the fullness of Dr. King's dream; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, the U.S. poverty rate was 11.4 percent, an increase from 2019, and there were approximately 37.2 million people living in poverty, with an increase of 3.3 million people living in poverty from 2019 to 2020, according to the U.S. Census Bureau; and

WHEREAS, the poverty rate for children under the age of eighteen was 16.1 percent in 2020; and

WHEREAS, 19.5 percent of Black people in the U.S. live in poverty; Black Americans had the highest rate of poverty across the racial groups examined for this latest U.S. Census report; and

WHEREAS, states with the highest poverty rates according to *Forbes* magazine are Mississippi: 20.3 percent of population lives below the poverty line; Louisiana: 19.2 percent of population lives below the poverty line; New Mexico: 19.1 percent of population lives below the poverty line; West Virginia: 17.6 percent of population lives below the poverty line; Kentucky: 17.3 percent of population lives below the poverty line; Arkansas: 17.0 percent of population lives below the poverty line; Alabama: 16.7 percent of population lives below the poverty line; Oklahoma: 15.7 percent of population lives below the poverty line; Tennessee: 15.2 percent of population lives below the poverty line; and South Carolina: 15.2 percent of population lives below the poverty line; and

WHEREAS, the real median household income for Black people is the lowest across all racial groups (\$45,870) and is \$10,000 less than the next highest group; and

WHEREAS, based on the U.S. Census, the real median household income for Black people is \$22,000 less than the average real median household income for all races, and the real median household income for Black people is \$29,000; and

WHEREAS, the median net worth for Black households is \$20,730, while the net worth of non-Hispanic White households is \$181,440, and Black households have the lowest wealth attainment across the groups observed in the data; and

WHEREAS, as of January 2022, Black unemployment is up to 7 percent while national unemployment is down to 3.9 percent; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we commemorate

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and celebrate the work he did in the past to bring equitable and fair opportunities for economic equity.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.